Soviet-American Exchanges—Tit-for-Tat Goodwill

Carefully regulated flow of people plays a small, but significant, role in East-West relations.

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There is a modest corner of Soviet-American relations where citizens of both countries can try to dent the massive sets of tensions and fears that compose the cold war. It goes by the awkward and unsuggestive name of "exchanges." The corner is small: In a half-dozen years of formal existence, exchanges have sent only five or six thousand people from each side to the other. And it is cluttered: The ranks have included symphony orchestras and librarians, Red Cross officials and farmers, lighthouse keepers and ping pong players, as well as several thousand scientists. Yet the limited numbers and erratic dispersion of the exchanges are misleading. They play a role more and not less real for being largely symbolic, more and not less telling for being small. This is evident to both governments, which recently extended exchanges for two more years on by-now-familiar lines.

While Stalin ruled, American overtures for exchanges were fruitless. President Eisenhower discussed the matter with Premier Khrushchev in the Geneva glow of 1955, but the Polish and Hungarian revolutions of the next year nipped what by then were only buds. Through 1957 the atmosphere warmed, and on 27 January 1958 the State Department signed the first formal exchange agreement. Succeeding agreements came on 1 December 1959 and 8 March 1962. It is the fourth that has recently been negotiated, having been derailed temporarily last fall by the arrest of Frederick C. Barghoorn. Mechanically speaking, most exchange diplomacy takes place strictly on the working level. Chief Executives (but not yet President Johnson) and Secretaries of State occasionally throw in a kind word, but actual policy supervision takes place on the State Department's third tier (Assistant Secretary). Since 1960 the work has been done by a small staff of diplomats headed by Frank G. Siscoe, a 50-year-old lawyer with broad experience in Soviet-bloc affairs and a reputation as a thorough administrator and a wary negotiator. Siscoe often wears a harassed and harried look which befits his position as the traffic cop on the busiest of all streets between Washington and Moscow.

The preamble of each formal agreement states: "these exchanges will contribute significantly to the betterment of relations between the two countries, thereby contributing to a lessening of international tensions." This statement was a "belief" in the first pact; experience turned it into a more modest "hope" in the following ones. (A similar measure of the sophistication gained by both Soviets and Americans is that only the first agreement boasts of being negotiated "in a spirit of mutual understanding.") In fact, the lofty purpose stated in the preambles represents the lowest common denominator. Who is not for better relations and lower tension? If the exchanges had had to prove their worth in those terms, they would have been dropped long ago. Far from being a factor of East-West politics, they may not even be a reliable index. Their start signified a certain optimism on both sides, but their low-key, long-term, and private-person aspects supply momentum and largely immunize them from the fevers and chills of international affairs. The operational strategies of both Moscow and Washington are a far cry from their formal aims. Not to put too fine a point on it, the official American strategy might well be called "the taming of the shrewd" and the Soviet strategy "the skewering of the tame."

Briefly, the American government believes that in the eventual mellowing of the Soviet Union lies our best prospect for a peaceful stable world. Vigilance is meanwhile required, of course. But Moscow will mellow—will lose the ambitions and anxieties which make it dangerous—this rationale goes, as it becomes better fed and more attached to the status quo, and as the Soviet leaders and people are brought into the larger community beyond their borders. To expedite this process of change is the aim of our exchange program, and to this end we try to impart information about ourselves and encourage trust in us too. Since our greatest interest is in deep, permanent change, we most like long-range, in-depth exposure of Soviet citizens to American values and ways. Hence we push publications, exhibits, study, travel—things and people to give Soviets a chance to look beyond the ramparts of the official outlook. We would also like to whet the Soviets' appetite for consumer goods and the good life, on grounds that the more contented and secure they are, the safer we are. Their scientists concern us as a key group, better educated, better paid, rising, less ideological, as just the "new class" that we want to influence, encourage, befriend and learn from. From the security standpoint, we also want to see what Soviet science is up to, or rather what it is capable of, and to make sure that Soviet scientists keep to the strait and narrow while they are here. These are the assigned missions of, respectively, the CIA and the FBI, which perform them so discreetly that an inquiring reporter finds only the faintest traces that either agency has been at work.

The Soviet government similarly considers exchanges as an arm of foreign policy. Characteristically, it often refers to an exchange trip as a *komandirovka* (mission) rather than a *vizit* (visit). Soviet policy, however, does not have our muted long-range aim of quickening the transformation of

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the other society. Its aims are more immediate: to convey the image of a country that is cultured (Bolshoi Ballet), peace-loving ("Ballad of a Soldier") and scientifically hairy-chested, and to borrow from more advanced American technology and scientific achievement. (Exchanges also fill various domestic needs, such as rewarding the deserving with foreign travel and contacts and facilitating the social climb back from the Stalinist depths.) Neither government phrases its intentions so baldly, of course. The American soft-pedals the sociological load and the Soviet, the scientific. But the defining "giving" nature of the open society and the "taking" nature of the closed society are the basic sources from which exchanges spring.

These cross-purposes play nicely around the English-language magazine *USSR* and the Russian-language *Amerika* distributed as part of an information exchange. *Amerika* operates in a relative vacuum of non-official news about the United States; it is a slick, soft-sell job, better looking than anything at Soviet kiosks, and Russians snap it up. They snap it up, that is, if they can get it. *USSR* is also well turned out and edited in an un-Soviet low key. But in a buyer's market, how many Americans want to buy a Russian picture of Russia? Several thousand copies of *Amerika* are returned as "unsold" each month; the number happens to correspond with the number of copies of *USSR* which are admitted to be unsold. Russians privately tell of the Kiev repairman who accepted *Amerika* as his fee for fixing a local Communist Party official's refrigerator; the official had been charged with junking the "unsold" copies, but he found them more useful than money to get some things done.

U.S. "Gatekeeper"

The formal government agreements are the umbrella for all exchanges, but most scientists involved have come under separate subsidiary agreements arranged on the American side by the National Academy of Sciences (for survey trips, researchers, lecturers, and conferees), the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants (doctoral and post-doctoral students), and such official agencies as the Public Health Service, Atomic Energy Commission, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The public and private parts of this jerry-built structure, financed as variously as it is formed, coexist uneasily but peacefully. The State Department, hardly more than a gatekeeper for incoming Soviets, worries about what will happen once it lets them into the hands of the host university or agency. While he ran a foundation which financed some exchanges, now-Secretary of State Rusk wondered if the government had any business arranging deals it didn't pay for. But a half-dozen years of practice have smoothed the edges well enough. In that time, mostly within but sometimes outside the different agreements, hundreds of American scientists a year have gone to the U.S.S.R. for varying missions and terms, and somewhat fewer Soviet scientists have come to our shores.

Negotiating Points

The negotiation of these agreements has been an arduous but illuminating experience in itself. Take the one thrashed out for 1962–63 by the Soviet and American Academies of Sciences. For our team the load was carried by Paul Doty of Harvard and the Academy's chief staff assistant, former Foreign Service Officer Lawrence C. Mitchell. The Russians, whose pride and policy in this instance overlapped, insisted that participants be "prominent." Feeling safer in the arms of plans and bureaucracies, they wanted a single 2-year list of subjects; feeling restricted, we wanted no list at all, and 1-year lists were agreed on. We wanted the cream-skimming 1-month survey visits to be not only for familiarization but "for informal discussions," in order to make give and take a formal obligation; they wouldn't accept it. We managed, however, to raise the number and duration of longer research-and-study visits. We also got a new provision for ad hoc exchanges by personal invitation, in effect bypassing formal channels, again in line with our bent for flexible unofficial maneuver; the invitations have been extended but rarely accepted by Russians. They wanted assurances that their scientists could make tours of research facilities before or after scientific conferences here; but because they were sometimes using these pre- and post-parley visits to avoid obligations of reciprocity, we agreed to facilitate such tours only "insofar as possible."

Cross-purposes flash, too, through the young-scholar exchanges, handled by the 36-university Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants and the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education. It turns out that Americans are not allowed to study at the scientific institutes under the Soviet Academy of Sciences, only at institutions under the Ministry. Our universities, of course, make no such distinction. The foreseeable result has been a Russian student corps heavy with scientists and an American group focused in the humanities and social sciences. From the point of view of the United States's interest in exploring and circulating ideas, this is fine. It also suits the fact that few young American scientists know Russian and fewer still feel that the Soviets are ahead of the United States in their particular field of research. But from the point of view of strict "reciprocity," there is a question. Ignoring all other considerations, Rep. Michael Feighan (D–Ohio) recently cut loose. "Russian student and scientific studies in the United States penetrate into the vitals of our scientific life," he complained (without effect) to the State Department, "while studies pursued by legitimate American students in the U.S.S.R. border on boondoggling. The essential element of reciprocity on which this program has sought justification is completely lacking in matters of substance."

Reciprocity Controversy

Reciprocity: An official American requirement, it is the pivotal word of exchanges and it veritably groans under its weight of national purpose and administrative complexity. At the outset, there is the "simple" apples-and-oranges aspect. Are three longer bookings for "My Fair Lady" in the U.S.S.R. (a big hit) equal to 15 shorter bookings here for the Georgian Dancers? Are highway delegations a fair swap if Russia's roads are ruts? Very quickly, hard questions of national policy intrude too. The arrangements for exchange of radio and television programs, for instance, have floundered almost completely on the Soviet desire to control information which Soviet citizens receive. In the exchange of scientists, both the practical and the policy aspects of reciprocity have generally been in full

flower. The apples-and-oranges problem looms large, and so does the problem of differing American and Soviet stresses on science exchanges. There is a special complication, too, in the traditional Russian instinct for secrecy and in the prerogatives of security on both sides. The result has been at least four schools of thought on reciprocity and, in fact, on the nature and purpose of exchanges as a whole.

Russian officials make up the first school. As they have revealed by deed and dropped word, they find a marginal use for reciprocity as a stick with which to belabor American exchange administrators. Innocent American scientists and inquiring reporters have been told that, but for the unfortunate insistence of American officials on the bureaucratic principle of reciprocity, the exchanges could go ever so much more smoothly. Reciprocity is also useful to the Soviets, one suspects, as an excuse for their restrictions on American exchangees and as a checkrein on Soviet. Basically, however, reciprocity dilutes Russian control over the program and makes Moscow give roughly as much as it takes, and therefore Russian officials don't like it.

Harshness Advocates

A second school, of Americans, feels that the principle is not enforced with appropriate harshness and that, because of this lapse, the Russians steal us blind. This is the point of view expressed by Rep. Feighan and periodically by some of his House colleagues, particularly by those whose districts are seasoned with World War II emigrés from Eastern Europe. Seeing little worth anyway in exchanges, many in this group do not share the basic American assumptions underlying the exchange program: that the cold war is not a permanent or desirable state of affairs, that the quest for understanding and peace is more than a delusion or snare, and that the evolution of the Soviet Union can be given a friendly little push.

The third school, also of Americans, includes some of the country's most distinguished scientists and academics. They find high personal, scholarly, and political values in exchanges and they consider reciprocity restrictions as know-nothing bureaucratic dodges which sully the apolitical pursuit of knowledge and the American spirit of free inquiry and which also wrongly penalize the innocent Soviet visitor for the misdeeds of his government. The retaliatory travel curbs formerly imposed on Soviet exchangees drew the particular fire of these critics (we lifted most of these curbs in mid-1962, a gesture not reciprocated by the Soviets). Better to turn the other cheek, to show Russians the freedoms denied them at home, to make liberty and liberality their own rewards, and to place on the Russians a moral and fraternal obligation to reciprocate, these critics believe. Princeton for one flew this group's colors a few years back when the Atomic Energy Commission denied a Soviet professor access to a high-energy accelerator on its campus. The university declared it "preferable to abandon such exchanges until such time as they can be conducted in the full spirit of academic freedom." But it did not and, indeed, learned to live with reciprocity, even while disliking it.

There is a fourth school of reciprocity, friendly toward it on the basis that nothing else gives the Russians enough incentive to make a fair bargain. Understandably, this is the view of the State Department, which polices the principle through its statutory control over visas and through the control it asserts over itineraries. This is, in fact, the view of almost everyone with experience in dealing with Russia. The private groups which administer exchanges may quibble here or there, but generally they find reciprocity their sturdiest oar. An individual's testimonial came from an astronomer who did research in Russia, Harold Zirin of the High Altitude Observatory in Boulder, Colorado. He reported that "although we had opposed the doctrine of reciprocity before our arrival, we found very quickly that it was our only hope for decent treatment (by the Soviet Academy)."

Scientific Conferences

There is room for flexibility, as the State Department has shown in what is by far the most tormented area of exchanges, attendance at scientific conferences. The core problem is that the Soviets want to choose both the conferences they will attend here and the ones we will attend in Russia. In this area, which is littered with linguistic and financial difficulties, conflicting notions of security and usefulness, ill feelings and aide-memoires, the State Department has seen fit to relax certain reciprocity obligations. It has also relaxed and permitted ad hoc personal invitations to be issued to Soviet scientists without such obligations. Grievances remain on the part of some American scientists. One suspects that a source of their discomfort is not just the reciprocity issue but a feeling that they are being treated as pieces on the State Department's chessboard. There is some basis for this feeling in the tacit official view that, however valuable in themselves the scientific exchanges are, they also make up the necessary and tolerable price the United States pays for the cultural and informational exchanges, in which the Soviet Union has less interest. Scientists are, in fact, something of a bargaining counter. Hence it may be not that reciprocity outrages their conscience but that it bruises their self-esteem.

Evaluation Difficult

How go exchanges? The authoritative official judgment is conveyed by the decision of both the White House and the Kremlin to continue the program. Indicative of this view was the surprise and worry shown by both governments that the Barghoorn incident would foul the works. (Barghoorn, center of the noisiest storm to blow up around the arrest of any American in Russia in recent years, was a tourist and not an exchangee; the Yale Soviet expert was held on unspecified spy charges for a fortnight and released on the personal request of President Kennedy. His misfortune left no visible scars on the exchange program.) Actually, exchanges lend themselves poorly to collective evaluation. Their core is the experience of individual participants, the facts and feelings they impart and ingest, the currents they break and start. This experience is the major concern of this discussion. Obviously and unfortunately, it will have to lean on the American side.

Where, to the governments, exchanges are only one facet of a large and complex relationship, to the participants they are a funnel and a framework for a major share of their views of the other land. The men (and very few women) who have been exchanged are by and large

among the scientific and intellectual elite and thus represent both their "constituency" and their country on a generally high level. Most of the Americans are private citizens to whom the exchanges give an opportunity for contact with Russians which ordinarily is had only by a few public servants; furthermore, they are volunteers with—necessarily—strong personal motivations. Then, one coin of the exchange realm is knowledge and understanding. This immediately adds elements of non-politicality and universality, individualism and idealism. These elements are often conspicuous by their absence and more so by the shape given them by realities. But at the least they offer a promising start.

Soviets Responsive

A brief word can be said about Soviet exchange scientists. Gone are the days when invitations to Russians never drew a response. Except for the longer-term research stints, most pre-planned berths in the sciences have been filled. Almost uniformly, ad hoc invitations have fallen dead. Russians have confided to Americans that their countrymen cannot come here unaccompanied, but exceptions seem to be mounting. Russians, even year-long students, do not bring their families. The lists of Academy candidates and graduate-student candidates are regularly larded with men seeking entry to security-sensitive areas sure to be ruled out of bounds by our government, but the ranks have still been well filled. The various American hosts and administrators seem to have knocked themselves out to please. For instance, the Public Health Service, something of a humanitarian clearing in the security jungle, has sought and received visa extensions to allow a Soviet scientist to finish a research project. The Atomic Energy Commission has given as freely as it has got, which is quite freely. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has given considerably more information and facility inspections than it has got, but it intends to right the balance. Informed Americans have gotten the impression that the Soviet visitors valued their trips. There have been almost no incidents. The most serious, hushed up by both sides, was the defection—the first reported defection by any exchangee—of a Soviet graduate student at Harvard in early 1964. Then there was the Soviet researcher who skipped a point on his itinerary and had the FBI tearing out its hair for 3 days until he, innocent, was found.

"A Visit to Frustratia"

For Americans, getting there is little of the fun, unless the Soviets make an exception of the trip. Professors have taken the semester's leave, rented the house and farmed out the children, only to find no berth. A Public Health Service metabolism-genetics group, Moscow-bound last year, had to unpack because their hosts at the last minute were "on vacation"; they never went. A psychologist feelingly labeled his report "A visit to frustratia." One American found his mission crippled by his placement in a hotel a dozen miles from downtown, another by the shortage of translators. Living conditions for longer-term exchangees have often been inadequate by American standards. But these cases are cited as examples of the worst. To one who has surveyed a broad range of exchanges, the comings and goings and arrangings have been sometimes enraging, rarely easy but usually smooth enough to make the trip stand on substance, not on form.

"We had five glasses at our place," said one of the first American exchangees, "and all were used. Vodka with buckets of caviar. Toasts went with each course. Beautiful white wine and later red wine from (Soviet) Georgia. Champagne and ice cream with fruit for dessert. It lasted almost three hours and short ones they were. At the end we embraced each other in true Russian style. Wondered if this can be turned on and off like water." His report could have been written by almost any exchangee. Each has been heaped with hospitality of a sort thought to have gone out with the Romans. It is the Russian style, of course—the bridge and barrier they throw up for foreigners—but it has also been one of the regular weights of exchange experience, always tipping the gorged recipient toward a kindly view of his hosts, even as he wonders "if this can be turned on and off." For some it is only fun but for others, one guesses, it is flattery. For all it is a human avenue of approach to men distant and suspicious until fellowship makes its mark. Nor are the pleasures of the table the only ones proffered: "The telephone rang; the female on the other end invited herself up to my room," one scientist reported. "In discussing the matter with other American and Canadian guests (male) I found that they too were propositioned fairly frequently." American officials warn those travelers who ask about such provocations, which are felt to be the business of habit-ridden Soviet police authorities, not Soviet scientists or exchange administrators. As far as is known, the few American exchangees who have been compromised by phone mates, or the like, have gotten away with nothing more harmful than panic. No one can be sure, of course.

Last year an American found that some exercises of Soviet officialdom "resulted in much harassment, inconvenience, and embarrassment for many decent (Soviet) scientists and others who had to stay away from me, to treat me as a spy, and to cover up the mistakes and bum planning of bungling officials." Not surprisingly his trip soured and he thought Russia "a great, skillfully managed prison." (Not wanting to compromise his Russian friends or future exchange prospects, this man, like others quoted critically in this article, prefers anonymity.) By way of contrast, a mathematician, Richard C. Courant of New York University, found that leery Soviets were "apt to barricade themselves behind reservations, demands for 'reciprocity,' and bureaucratic formalities," but that "friendliness, appreciation, and openness removed such barriers." He got access to "remarkable and certainly completely unpublished new inventions of importance" and concluded that "the visitor is not made to feel that he is in a police state." These contrasts can be explained in part by peculiarities of person and circumstance and in part by the variety inevitable in a scene so huge as the Soviet. There is also reason to think that the sledding is easier in branches of science in which Soviet work matches American, a condition which tends to remove the bureaucratic and psychological cramps of an inferiority complex. A mathematician or physicist, for instance, may well do better than a biologist or agronomist.

All these factors were illustrated by another American mathematician in 1962. Good planning, a knowledge of Russian, no-nonsense persistence, and his earlier personal acquaintances got him most of what he wanted. One old Soviet friend was so embarrassed and intimidated by sanctions against him that the friend shunned him, but other Soviet colleagues committed a "deliberate violation" of official restrictions on his movement in order to fulfill the demands of personal and professional pride.

Soviet Pride

Pride is perhaps the most common quality which American scientists have detected in their Soviet colleagues. Premier Khrushchev stated an aspect of it in 1956: "The country's growing authority abroad is reflected in the flood of foreign delegations coming here." One Russian complained of the way in which his name had been transliterated for the American edition of his book. Another pronounced himself miffed that a Chinese translation of his book had come out 1½ years before the English edition. But to most Americans, the Soviets have been "hungry for news of the outside world" and have shown an "all-consuming curiosity." They have sought the honest and kindly critiques of American visitors and have shyly wanted to test Soviet science against American standards.

"There is no doubt that the Russian colleagues learned a great deal from conversations with us," wrote one American. A Soviet group impressed another visitor, chemist Paul Doty of Harvard, with its "high standards (and) ready acceptance of non-Russian discoveries." Doty, who has had extended experience with Soviets, also said this: "Surely the accessibility of at least a part of the Russian scientific community to normal contacts with Western scientists and the relatively large extent to which their thinking is not limited to ideological criteria should be recognized as a bridge over which understanding may be expanded." In scientific terms, the overall pattern has suggested to one close observer that exchanges convey "a rough estimate of the current state of basic science in the Soviet Union, a knowledge of the relative competence of the main centers, a sense of the trends in Soviet research and the rate at which future progress can be expected. Yet it is evident that only a small part of the scientific activity in the U.S.S.R. is immediately relevant to American work and even here the interaction has not yet for the most part reached the point of providing that mutually beneficial acceleration of research that must be the ultimate aim of scientific contact." Harold Zirin decided after his research stint that it was "worth the time and effort. I accomplished a certain amount of scientific work, and we had an unparalleled opportunity to learn about Russian life. Further, it was another small crack in the Iron Curtain."

Precisely here, at the point where personal experience takes on a political coloration, is where exchanges end. They add various degrees of awareness and sympathy, information and insight, to the participants and governments on both sides. But only those who believe—against a depressing amount of evidence to the contrary—that soluble misunderstanding is the cause of the cold war, ask exchanges to perform missions normally undertaken by politics and diplomacy, and by time. Yet exchanges kindle a small flame without which civilized life cannot go on. For all their snarls and frustrations, they set up tremors of personal and professional vibration which cut across the tensions of political difference. Exchanges finally look to the day when, as is now the case with our friends, there will be need for none.

News and Comment

Tobacco: Administration Showing Little Enthusiasm for Follow-Up on Public Health Service Report

Following release of the Surgeon General's report *Smoking and Health*, a story went around about a man who saw a film on the removal of a cancerous lung. "After I saw that," he said, "I decided to give up going to the movies."

It may not be accurate to say that the Johnson administration shares that moviegoer's sense of reality on the relationship between tobacco and health. After all, matters of greater import than tobacco have demanded the President's attention during the 11 weeks since the report was first issued; and, since it is thought to take years for the weed to work its evil, a few weeks' or months' delay in government action probably does not mean very much. Nevertheless, on the basis of what has happened so far, it is a short step to the conclusion that the White House has no appetite for displeasing the half-dozen southern states that share heavily in the $8-billion-a-year tobacco industry. And though Surgeon General Luther L. Terry was kind enough to assert, "I am not among those who believe that the tobacco industry has a dollar bill for a conscience," the industry, since the publication of *Smoking and Health*, has frequently performed in a fashion that suggests that Terry is a very charitable man. Events to date also suggest that, while the Public Health Service has been discreet and precise in its statements about tobacco and health, the current administration is not at all exultant about the intrusion of the government's medical service into the political jungles of tobacco. There is nothing to suggest, however, that Kennedy would have felt any more comfortable with the PHS's report. Politically, he was in far worse shape in the tobacco states than Johnson;